

THE LAST VOYAGE OF THE DONNA ISABEL

BY RANDALL PARRISH
AUTHOR OF "BOB HAMPTON OF PLACER, ETC."

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SYNOPSIS.

The story opens with the introduction of John Stephens, an adventurer, a Massachusetts man marooned by authorities at Valparaiso, Chile. Being interested in mining operations in Bolivia, he was denounced by Chile as an insurrectionist and as a consequence was hiding. At his hotel his attention was attracted by an Englishman and a young woman. Stephens rescued the young woman from a drunken officer. He was thanked by her. Admiral of the Peruvian navy confronted Stephens, told him that war had been declared between Chile and Peru and offered him the office of captain. He declined that night the Esmeralda, a Chilean vessel, should be captured. Stephens accepted the commission. Stephens met a motley crew, to which he was assigned. He gave them final instructions. They boarded the vessel. They successfully captured the vessel supposed to be the Esmeralda, through strategy. Capt. Stephens gave directions for the departure of the craft. He entered the cabin and discovered the English woman and her maid. Stephens quickly learned the wrong vessel had been captured. It was Lord Darlington's private yacht, the lord's wife and maid being aboard. He explained the situation to her ladyship.

CHAPTER IX.

In Which I Learn Our Port.

I sank down into the depths of an upholstered divan without, rested my head within my hands, and endeavored earnestly to collect thought and nerve for the coming struggle. The terrible-ness of our situation only became more apparent as I considered it in the light of the discoveries already made, and in my understanding of the nature of those with whom I was now associated. Neither Tuttle nor De Nova had ever mistaken the Sea Queen for the warship Esmeralda. It was impossible to conceive that these two trained seamen could have made such an error, or that the men under their command had been so utterly deceived. Tuttle's boat came up directly beneath the bows, with the riding lamps burning brightly and revealing the name; every man aboard must have seen it plainly. Yet what object could have led to so desperate an act of piracy? What part was I destined to play in the final working out of their lawless scheme?

The longer I studied over the problem the more thoroughly did I become mystified and confused. What could these men ever hope to accomplish in this lawless fashion? They must be fools or madmen. This was not the age of piracy; every league of sea was patrolled; every port protected by telegraphic communication.

Difficult as my own situation undoubtedly was, apparently helpless among this crew of sea devils, without a man on board in whom I could put trust, it was rendered a thousand times harder by the presence of those two women. In what way could I protect and serve them? I wondered if all the crew forward were in the plot, or were the leaders alone involved? Could I count on finding a single honest sailor in all that riffraff who would stand by me in revolt? There were others on board—the three seamen and the engineer of the yacht's crew, the Chilean officer captured on shore—but they were prisoners, far more helpless even than myself. The longer I thought the darker grew the prospect, the closer the cords of Fate pressed about me. There was nothing to do except to face the conspirators boldly, and thus ascertain the whole truth. I glanced upward at the tell-tale compass overhead—the vessel's course had already been altered; we were now headed westward, directly into the broad Pacific.

I met Tuttle at the end of the bridge, clinging to the handrail, his elbows flapping in the head wind. He never glanced toward me, the cool, studied insolence of the fellow causing me to feel more deeply than ever before his consciousness of power.

"The yacht is several points off her course," Mr. Tuttle, I said, sharply, determined to test him. "May I ask if the change was made by your order?"

"He swept one long arm toward the north, and, following the direction of his finger, I dimly perceived a spiral of black smoke barely visible above the horizon.

"I thought we had better sheer off, as there was no guessing who that fellow yonder might prove to be."

I remained silent, watching the distant smudge, and occasionally glancing sidewise into his imperturbable face, as he yawned sleepily.

"I rather guess one of us had better turn in," Mr. Stephens, he suggested suddenly, "for we'll have to arrange about our watches aft."

"Presently, Mr. Tuttle; we haven't breakfasted yet. Meanwhile I should prefer to understand matters a little more clearly. I've just been through the cabins. None of the yacht's officers are on board."

"I could see his thin lips drawn back in a sinister grin, which revealed his yellow teeth.

"The Lord help those who help themselves," he returned, piously, uprolling his eyes. "The race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong."



"The Hell You Say."

"I also discovered," I went on, angered by such abominable cant, "that this vessel we have captured is not the Chilean Esmeralda at all, but the yacht Sea Queen, owned by Lord Darlington, and flying the English flag."

"The hell you say."

"Moreover, I have not the slightest doubt that you knew it from the first. Now I demand some explanation, Mr. Tuttle. What does this mean?"

He stood leaning back against the rail facing me, the disagreeable grin gone from his lips, his half-closed eyes glinting uneasily.

"Well, what of it?"

"Only that we have committed an act of piracy. Every naval vessel of the civilized world will be used to hunt us down. We shall not be safe on any sea, nor able to land in any port of the globe. If we resist we shall be blown out of the water; if captured, our crime means death. You have deliberately deceived me into this affair for some secret purpose of your own; you have involved me in your crime, and now I insist upon some knowledge of your plan, and an explanation regarding my future authority on board."

"Oh, you are the captain," sneeringly. "What more can you want?"

"Then, if I am, we will head directly back to Valparaiso."

"Oh, I rather guess not," and Tuttle's eyes became instantly hard and ugly. "Nevertheless you're captain all right, just so long as you keep the nose of the old girl pointed the way we want her to go."

"That is it, is it?"

"Yes, that's exactly the ticket."

I turned partially aside, glancing toward the wheelman. The fellow was leaning forward over the spokes, evidently deeply interested in our controversy and endeavoring to hear all we had to say. Tuttle followed the direction of my eyes, but with apparent indifference.

"Oh, they all understand about it," he remarked, carelessly. "And now I guess maybe it's about time we gave you the main points to chew on. If you'll stop down into the charthouse, Mr. Stephens, I'll fetch some things I want to show you, and be along myself in a jiffy. Then I'll spin a yarn that'll cause you to come with us willin' enough, or else you're a dam' fool."

There was nothing else to do, and I followed him down the bridge steps to the main deck. The charthouse had its single door opening aft, and was a small, plainly built structure painted a dingy gray, with two narrow windows on either side, and just enough space within to contain a deal table, locker, and three rude benches. I sat down upon one of these, filled and lighted my pipe and waited in silence, gazing idly at the chart pinned flat on the table. It was a map of these waters lying off the Chilean coast, and a vessel's course had been pricked upon it from Juan Fernandez to Valparaiso. This did not particularly interest me, and my thought drifted naturally to the woman impatiently awaiting my return in the cabin. What a distressing situation for one of Lady Darlington's birth and refinement! And yet, with what

dignity of manner had she met the unexpected! It was plain to be seen that hers was a heart of courage, not easily broken under adversity.

And how could I hope to serve her? What would this crew of hell-hounds, these merciless sea-wolves, permit me to do? Trans-ship them upon some passing vessel? Put into some isolated island port? This was scarcely likely, for either act would involve the danger of an exposure they would be little inclined to assume. I comprehended already that it would be according to their decision, and not mine. I had been plainly informed how little my control extended over their desires. And whither were we bound? Into what strange seas? Into what species of wild adventure? The utter impossibility of keeping those two concealed below for any length of time was clearly evident. Ship life was far too restricted. Both Tuttle and De Nova would naturally expect to lodge aft, and it was a privilege they could not easily be denied. Yet what would they say, how would they act, when they finally discovered these two unwilling passengers aboard? What was my duty in all the circumstances? It was all a deep, unsolvable mystery, yet out of its mist constantly floated the appealing face of that woman awaiting me below. I could not desert her. I could not consider anything except how I might best serve her interests, best protect her from the contamination of this hell afloat.

Three shadows suddenly darkened the doorway, and Tuttle, accompanied by De Nova and the big seaman named Bill Anderson, entered. The second officer nodded to me in genial fashion, his white teeth gleaming, but Anderson slouched surlily past and dropped heavily on a bench, his coarse bulldog features devoid of all expression, his square jaws munching the tobacco in his cheek. I took notice of his eyes, staring straight out of the window opposite, dull, dog-like, deeply sunken under thatched brows, his skin like brown leather drawn tight, his short red neck, and gnarled hands. Altogether he appeared a repulsive brute, no more easily subdued than a jungle tiger. Tuttle sidled along to the opposite side of the table, upon which he placed a tightly rolled, yellowish-backed paper, evidently a navigating chart. As I watched him curiously, he suddenly pressed the point of his thumb down upon the paper.

"There's our first port, Mr. Stephens," he announced dogmatically. "There, where you see that red cross."

I bent over, started out of all assumed indifference as I studied the position indicated.

"Longitude 110° 30' west, and latitude 66° 17' south!" I exclaimed, scarcely crediting either ears or eyes. "Why, good God, man, that is almost upon the antarctic circle!"

He nodded, running his long fingers through his thin hair.

"Right you are, sir. I guess there won't be no warships a-trailin' after us down in them latitudes; not at this season of the year."

"But there's nothing there!" I con-

tinued, staring incredulously at the map. "Nothing but fog and floating ice. There is no land marked within 500 miles."

"Just the same there's land there," he retorted, positively, his thin lips pressed together. "I've seen it; two islands, an' that's where the Sea Queen pokes her nose."

I could merely sit back, staring at the fellow, who remained leaning both hands on the table, his glinting eyes on my face.

"It's a rum yarn, Mr. Stephens, I'll admit," he said, slowly, his nasal tone much in evidence, "but it's all true, sir, so help me, God! Here's the straight of it, an' you listea quiet till I get done. Then I'll answer your questions as long as you've got any to ask."

CHAPTER X.

In Which I Hear the Tale of the First Officer.

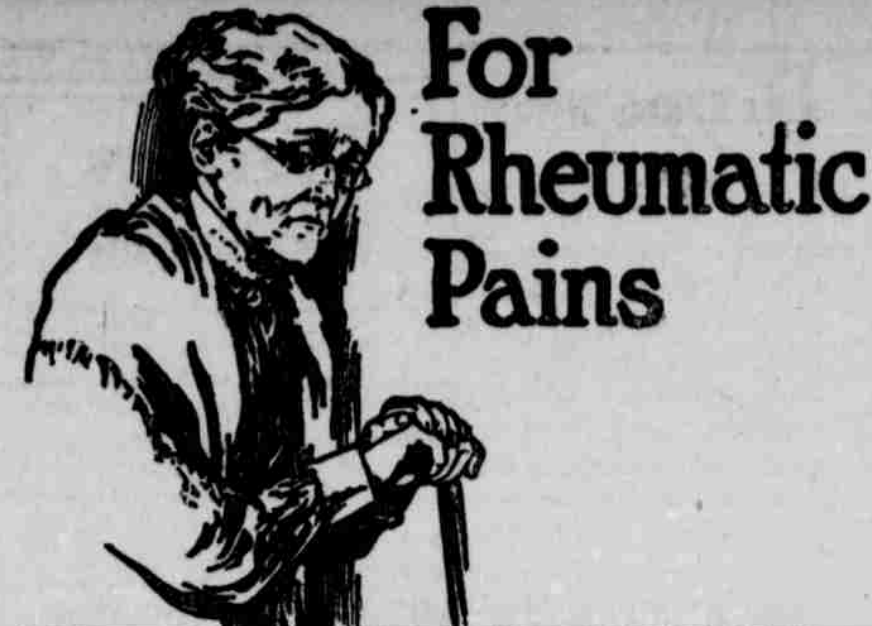
Tuttle required a while getting started, pulling aside his dangling coat-tails to sit down facing me, and then twiddling his long fingers with his gaze bent on the deck. I take it that his intellectual operations were naturally slow, although he was swift enough in all matters appertaining to seamanship. Anyhow, he sat there for so long, his whole appearance so sleek and oily, that I lost all patience, shuffling my feet on the deck. The noise served to arouse him.

"It commenced somethin' like over two years ago sir," he began, mousing each word with care, "a little earlier in the season than this is now. I was master of the whalin' bark Betsy, sailin' from Province town, an' we were homeward bound after about 18 months' cruizin' in the South Pacific, carryin' a fair cargo of oil an' whale trimmings. We were roundin' the Horn, being about 70 degrees west and 56 degrees south when the real trouble began. I know that was rather a low latitude, but we had been buckin' against head winds an' a high sea for more'n a week, an' besides were short-handed, five of the crew havin' skipped out at Somers island, where we put in after fresh water. Anyway, it was about there that a storm hit us from out the northeast. I guess it must have been one end of a hurricane. I never see nothin' fiercer, even in those seas. There was nothin' to do but turn tail an' scud, the ropes and canvas being so stiff with ice. Well, we batteden down, an' took chances, but for a while I thought every wave was goin' to do for the ol' hooker an' send us all to Davy Jones. I couldn't see five feet from the rail, an' I had to keep diggin' ice out o' my eyes to see at all. The wind had the feel of a solid wall, sir."

Tuttle was leaning forward now, his elbows on the table. His lean, solemn countenance had lost its listlessness, and I also noticed the eager interest imprinted on the faces of his two comrades.

"We was jest roundin' the point," he went on as soon as he took a long breath, "the Betsy keelin' over so's her deck was all awash, an' with no more than maybe 100 yards o' clear water to the good. Back o' an' ugly lookin' headland the coast seemed to fall away sudden into a sort o' cove, which was piled high with great ice hummocks, behind which the ice wall rose up sheer almost to the top o' the rocks. There was a sorter shelf along the edge of it, an' a-settin' up there in full view was the damndest lookin' vessel ever I saw in 50 years o' seafarin'. So help me God, sir, I saw it with my own eyes, as plain as I'm lookin' at you! It was h'listed up all o' 20 feet above the lower ice-field, an' sort o' careened over where it was froze fast so as to show the decks amidships clear to the inner rail. You remember them ships what Columbus sailed in? Well, this hooker was that kind, only a blame' sight bigger. I guessed her at 850 or 900 ton, but she had the same sort o' build—a big high stern, with an after-cabin clear across it, the waist sunk down in a curve, an' the fo'castle raised up like a house, with blunt bows, an' a monster bowsprit forkin' straight up into the air. The whole outfit was so cased with ice an' glittered so in the sun that it seemed like a part o' the ice cliff, which had took that queer shape from thawin' an' freezin'. Damme if I didn't think it was somethin' like that for a minute—a blame' freak o' nature—but when I grabbed the glasses, an' got a good look through them, it was a ship all right, the kind you read about in the books what navigated these waters a hundred or more years ago. I was still a-startin' at it with all my eyes when we raised the stern, which stood h'listed up a bit higher than the bow, an' where the steady dash of the waves didn't break clean over it, an' the sun fell just right so I read the hooker's name. By God, I did, sir! It was there plain as day: Donna Isabel, Cadiz."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)



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Fatal Course.

A matron who was visiting her former home city, and was under full headway with the seemingly endless string of questions usual in such a case.

"And your sister's daughter Violet?" she asked.

"Violet is married," the friend replied.

"Indeed! My! How time does fly. Happily married, I trust?"

"Oh, dear, no! My sister always humored her, you know," was the response, "and the poor child was permitted to marry the man she was in love with!"—Sunday Magazine of the Cleveland Leader.

Belgium Has No Navy.

Belgium is, perhaps the most prosperous state in Europe, as well as the most thickly settled. The late king's reign was at least marked by an enormous advance in wealth and social reform. One of the country's special advantages is that its international neutralization permits it to dispense with a navy, while the Belgian army is maintained on a very small and inexpensive basis.

Taking No Risk.

"Why's a bachelor a bachelor?" "It depends; but it is seldom for the same reason that an old maid's an old maid."—Judge.

She Jumped.

Edna—Did you jump when he kissed you under the mistletoe?
Camille—I had to. He is six feet two, and I am only four feet six.

SHE QUIT

But It Was a Hard Pull.

It is hard to believe that coffee will put a person in such a condition as it did an Ohio woman. She tells her own story:

"I did not believe coffee caused my trouble, and frequently said I liked it so well I would not, and could not quit drinking it, but I was a miserable sufferer from heart trouble and nervous prostration for four years.

"I was scarcely able to be around, had no energy and did not care for anything. Was emaciated and had a constant pain around my heart until I thought I could not endure it. For months I never went to bed excepting to get up in the morning. I felt as though I was liable to die any time.

"Frequently I had nervous chills and the least excitement would drive sleep away, and any little noise would upset me terribly. I was gradually getting worse until finally one time it came over me and I asked myself what's the use of being sick all the time and buying medicine so that I could indulge myself in coffee?

"So I thought I would see if I could quit drinking coffee and get some Postum to help me quit. I made it strictly according to directions and I want to tell you, that change was the greatest step in my life. It was easy to quit coffee because I had the Postum which I now like better than the old coffee.

"One by one the old troubles left, until now I am in splendid health, nerves steady, heart all right and the pain all gone. Never have any more nervous chills, don't take any medicine, can do all my housework, and have done a great deal beside."

Read "The Road to Wellville," in pkgs. "There's a Reason."

Ever read the above letter? A new one appears from time to time. They are genuine, true, and full of human interest.

Power of Example.

"It ain't a pretty kind world for a poor old Swede woman like me," said Christine. "But sometimes I do a pretty good world anyways. I was at a place yesterday were de lady always make me iron all afternoon und den send me home mitout my supper. So yesterday I told her how kind you was to me, und how you tell me set down and rest till supper get ready, und git me money for de street car so I don't have to walk home ven I been so tired, und all about you. So ven I put away de irons yesterday dot lady she say to me: 'Set down und have somethin' to eat pretty soon, Christine; you not be in de way.' Dot's because I tell her about you, ma'am. I tink lots of peoples be gooder if dey know about somebody else bel'n' good."—Newark News.

She Had Noticed It.

Mrs. Knicker.—They say the purchasing-power of a dollar has diminished.

Mrs. Bocker.—Yes, it used to buy a bargain worth \$1.98, and now it only gets something worth \$1.49.

The Graveled Geometer.

Euclid was boasting of his abilities. "But," cried his wife, "can you find why our gas bills are just as big as when they charged a dollar a thousand cubic feet?"

With a moan he sped into the night.

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